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## Ongoing exclusion within universal education: why education for all is not inclusive

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## **Ongoing exclusion within universal education: Why *Education for All* is not *Inclusive***

By Jonathan Rix and John Parry – Open University

### **Introduction**

Why is there any need for special education in a school system which is intended to educate the entire population (the so-called compulsory education system), and why has this need been continually growing? (Kivirauma and Kivinen 1998, p.153)

The issue that Kivirauma and Kiriven raised when considering the relationship between special education and the general school system anticipated a tension underpinning the original 'Education for all' agenda. The Jomtien Declaration and Framework for Action represented a comprehensive international commitment to develop access to high quality basic education for every child. The availability of such provision was regarded as a pivotal human right, essential to well being at a personal and societal level (Miles and Singal 2010) and as aspirations appear beyond critique. However whereas the 'all' may be less contested (it encompasses all children regardless of ethnicity, gender, ability) the notion of 'education', in terms of content, context and setting, may be more contentious. The direction set by the declarations at Jomtien steered the signatories on a course towards universal primary education but not necessarily universal inclusive education. There was no clear statement that inherent within such universality was the principle that all children should learn together within inclusive schools (Peters 2005, Kiuppis 2013). Consequently when participants reconvened in Salamanca four years later, those allied to furthering the rights of disabled children and those labelled with special educational needs were motivated to provide greater clarity on this dimension of the 'Education for all' agenda.

The statements that emerged from the Salamanca conference re-emphasised that disabled children and other marginalized young people should be positioned within the 'all'. No child could be considered ineducable or cast outside the domain of universal schooling (Miles and Singal 2010). Additionally the Salamanca vision clearly framed 'education for all' children within an inclusive system:

schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups. (UNESCO 1994, 6)

In doing so Salamanca served as a reminder that: *A commitment to providing education for all children is not about 'bums on seats', but about revisiting our conceptions about schooling and the purpose of education* (Miles and Singal 2010 p.12). Its Framework for Action not only affirmed that all schools should serve all children but that this inclusive approach raised the quality and experience of education for everyone (Ainscow 1999, Rustemier 2002).

However in the two decades post Salamanca there has been increasing pressure on the delivery of *inclusive education for all* within school systems that are entrenched in a competitive market environment and a regime of standards, benchmarks and accountability (Armstrong et al 2011). Tomlinson suggests that as governments have pursued the development of knowledge economies through education more young people have been seen as surplus to the mainstream (Tomlinson 2012). Even in countries like Sweden that have historically engaged with inclusion, the ‘turn toward neo-liberalism and educational consumerism’ has relegated some groups of young people to receiving ‘schooling for surviving the social and economic consequences of curtailed citizenship’ rather than ‘schooling for full citizenship or social transformation’ (Beach and Sernhede 2011.p.257). Consequently in a climate of subservience to ever narrowing definitions of success and achievement, student diversity can become something to be managed and controlled whilst the principles of Salamanca inform tokenistic inclusion policies rather than educational practice.

In this chapter we acknowledge that the marketisation of education has impacted on both the *Education for all* and *Inclusive education for all* agendas but we also recognize that the specific cultural context within different nations and localities will also shape how universal education is interpreted and developed (Miles and Singal 2010). We will therefore look at three countries in order to consider not only the wider constraints imposed by neo-liberal educational ideology but also the particular legacy of previous policies, practices and provision within each state. In doing so we hope to explore recurrent trends, contradictions and tensions in their development of inclusion within an *Education for all* agenda and discuss how widening participation in established education systems often simply reconstitutes the exclusion of those who are perpetually marginalised. Our discussions will underline why, despite the declaration at Jomtien, meeting at Salamanca was a necessity to provide a blueprint to reconstitute traditional education systems and how following that blueprint encounters frequent obstructions and diversions.

### **A UK experience**

Looking firstly at the UK we find that, over the two decades since Jomtien and Salamanca there has been no significant shift towards universal inclusive education. Figures from each of the four nations show that their mainstream systems continue to struggle to include a consistent proportion of the pupil population who are consequently accommodated within the special school sector. It seems that although the education policy of the four UK nations has become increasingly devolved, this is one area where there is a great deal of parity.

In Scotland the numbers being placed outside the mainstream in units and special schools has remained relatively constant: 7140 pupils in 2005 and 6976 in 2012 (The Scottish Government 2012a). Significantly this consistency of placements has occurred against a backdrop of a steadily declining total school population, from over 700000 in 2005 to 671000 in 2011(The Scottish Government 2012b). The data from Northern Ireland indicates similar stability over a five year period with 4598 pupils placed in special

schools in the province in 2008/9 rising slightly to 4653 in 2012/13 and the total school population during the same period fluctuating between 324000 and 325000 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012). In Wales, (see Figure 1) there has been a 1 per cent drop in attendance of special schools in a 17-year period, though the numbers attending have gone up slightly, reflecting a slight increase in pupil numbers overall during this time. Figures from England (see Figure 2), showing a drop in special school attendance of about 3 per cent between 1995 and 2011, indicate that more pupils are being included in mainstream schools. However this needs to be balanced against the increase in pupils attending pupil referral and special units which remain largely separate from regular schools.

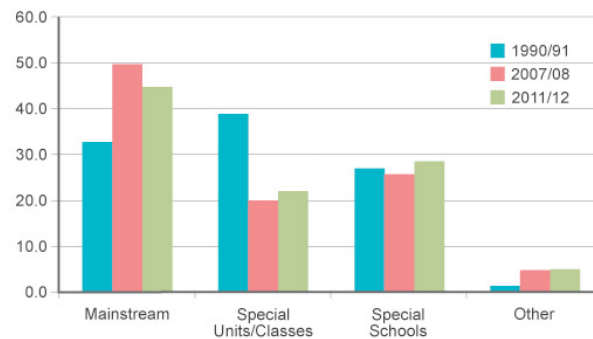


Figure 1: Destination of pupils with statements in Wales (Source: Welsh Government 2012)

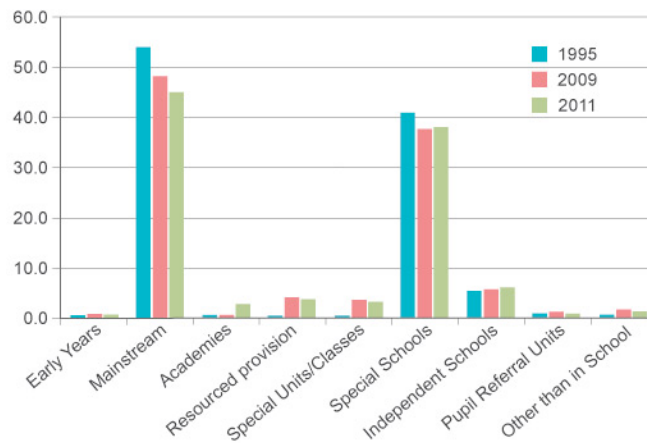


Figure 2: Destination of pupils with statements in England (DfEE, 1998; DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011a)

The data suggests that far from any ‘bias towards inclusion’ (DfE 2011b, p.5), a situation of stasis remains and that the pursuit of *education for all* in the UK has meant making sufficient provision for pupils divided along the established lines of mainstream and special. This is not the full picture however. Many mainstream schools have engaged with the process of providing quality education for all children (Dyson and Gallanaugh 2007, Lalluvin 2010). For example, in their focused research in Scottish primary schools Florian and Black Hawkins were able to identify clear examples of inclusive pedagogy where teachers were:

shifting the focus from one that is concerned with only those individuals who have been identified as having ‘additional needs’ to the learning of all children in the community of the classroom. (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011, p.818)

However what also became clear from this research was that those teachers who wished to develop such inclusive pedagogy were faced with ‘a number of challenges and dilemmas in practice’ (p. 819) which were created by school policy rather than the classroom situation. For example setting pupils by ‘ability’ limited the teacher’s opportunities to group children more flexibly and the required approach to differentiation, matching activities to perceived individual ability, marginalised children and fragmented the opportunities of interactive learning.

Florian and Black-Hawkins’ research highlights that ‘the determinist beliefs that pervade education policy make it difficult for teachers to take alternative decisions and actions that reject such beliefs’ (p.820). Wayne Veck found that Learning support assistants (LSA) were similarly constrained in their role not so much by specific policies but by entrenched attitudes and practices revolving around their one-to-one support role with students (Veck 2009). With this restricted remit the LSA’s were devalued as practitioners and their educational contribution overlooked within the college in which they worked. The one-to-one support allowed the students access to rather than significant participation in the classroom and ‘became part of the ‘rituals and cultural practices’ that fortified borders between who is valued and who is not, between who is judged to fit and who must be excluded’ (Veck 2009, p.47). Veck suggests that this fixed approach to providing support denies the LSA ‘the opportunity to enhance educational spaces for all students’ and will consequently ‘block inclusive imagination’ (p.49).

In longitudinal research carried out by the authors in two UK secondary schools there was similar evidence of established processes and practice undermining intentions to develop inclusion (Parry et al. 2013). Drawing upon two research visits ten years apart to each school, this study showed in both cases there was a shift away from practices which were previously seen as being central to the development of inclusion. In one school the focal point of the provision was a resourced unit for a group of pupils identified with ‘complex special educational needs’, located in a separate building on the campus. Initially students from this base were included in a wide range of lessons in the main part of the school and within year group activities along with the rest of their peers. A decade later, despite an extensive construction programme which saw the facility relocated to the heart of the school building, it was evident that the unit had become more of a separate school within a school. Students only attended certain ‘non academic’ lessons in the main school and their opportunities to socialise with peers in the communal areas during break times were restricted by the availability of staff to ‘supervise’.

Inclusion and participation in the second school was promoted through its focus on engaging with the local community, vibrant pupil councils and supporting all children to learn in ordinary classrooms. On the return visit ten years later the pupil councils had become inactive and the location of community services on campus had failed to materialise. A wide range of pupils were still accommodated within the school but the

LSA's reflected that they spent more time in a new Additional Support Department teaching groups and individuals than in the main school. As with the first school major rebuilding had also taken place resulting in a brand new fully accessible school. However the Additional Support Department was now situated in the basement as part of the modernisation or as the LSA's observed 'stuck away in the corner', 'less integrated' and 'out of sight, out of mind'.

Both schools attributed their increased use of separate provision for specific groups of pupils as a necessary response to a national standards agenda which required a focus on pupil performance, league tables, a specified curriculum and successful inspections. The connection between children's perceived level of difficulty, amount of support available and time spent in the mainstream classrooms increasingly framed decisions about the placement of pupils. Decisions were being made in response to widening participation for what the two settings perceived to be a changing pupil demographic, children labelled with 'complex and profound learning difficulties' and 'challenging behaviours'. Consequently this meant a fragile compromise between managing students who might disrupt long standing classroom routines and addressing these same pupils' potential failure in the established educational structure (Armstrong et al., 2011). Increasing stratification of provision around specific individuals or groups of pupils became the framework which both schools believed was necessary to continue to respond to the educational needs of the children, a framework embedded in 'the institutional separation of 'regular' and 'special' schooling' (Slee, 2008, p.99). The resilience of such compartmentalisation and its underlying influence on education systems is a theme that resonates when examining the developments in the United States.

### **A US Experience**

As is evident from the building projects at the heart of the UK experience above, many countries have been increasing expenditure on education for all and in particular upon special education. In the United States (US), for example, between 1996 and 2005 41% of all increased expenditure was on special education, to a point where it was estimated at 21% of all education spending for 13.8 % of the school population. Since 2005 this growth stabilised with some slight drops for some types of impairment (eg: "specific learning disabilities" and "mental retardation") and rises for others (eg: "Autism" and "other health impairment) but still represented 13.1 percent of all students in 2009-10 (Scull & Winkler, 2011). Despite this expenditure however, familiar problems seem to remain. In summarising their study of the recent trends Scull and Winkler conclude:

America needs to approach special education with greater creativity and flexibility in the future than it has shown in the past. Instead of engaging in polarizing discussions around whether to mainstream students versus serve them in pull-out settings—or around the disproportionate identification of students by race—let's focus on how to differentiate learning for *all* students. In other words, how can we make education "special" for every one of our students, reserving unique services for the small percentage of severely disabled children who need them? (p16)

These challenges exist within a system which has undertaken sustained policy development focussed upon marketisation and standardisation and produced a legislative framework entitled No Child Left Behind. This marketisation policy agenda would appear to have had little positive impact. In their reports on the impact of Charter Schools (US schools freed from centralised control) the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (CREDO, 2013; Raymond, 2009), found that in 2009 there was a slightly negative picture of average charter school performance, with academic development being slightly lower than traditional state schools, whilst in 2013 results were a slight improvement on the 2009 study (see Figure 3). However any slight gains had to be set against Charters having over 35% fewer Special Education Students (8%) compared to the overall National Average of all schools (13%) and having more focus upon the teaching of English and Maths.



Figure 3: Academic Growth of Charter Schools for all students in Reading and Maths Compared to their Local Markets. (There were small identified learning gains in these two subjects in Charters that were in the 2009 study but not new Charters.)

Standardisation approaches similarly seemed to recreate marginalisation in the name of Learning for All and Inclusion. Waitoller and Kozleski (under review) report upon a professional learning school relationship between a university and three elementary urban schools in the US aiming to transform schools for inclusive education. They identify the pervasive notion of *quality for all students*, and how this is used to drive change, in particular through team curriculum-design, classroom observation, and performativity - a standardisation technology using public displays of data to judge, compare and supposedly control quality. These displays of data (ie: data walls) were seen as objective and neutral and served as a rationale for correcting teaching practices. The intention is that teacher can inspect, correct and appraise themselves. The data walls presented all the students scores on standardised tests and served as a point of discussion at weekly meetings. It became evident to the university partners that the dominant professional vision of an inclusive teacher had been a need to identify which students were falling behind their peers:

In the professional vision of the school, inclusion for all students meant auditing and inspection for all. (p28)

The students were reduced to single scores representing performance on a narrow skill.

The authors concluded that as a result of these work practices:

Inclusive education has resulted in the continuation of labeling and segregation of those students considered different from the dominant culture of the school. (p43)

These were not the old labels of special education though:

We demonstrated that though teachers and administrators aimed to erase special education disability categories from their discourse and practice during Friday meetings, new labels and sorting mechanisms emerged according to the assessments dictated by the school district. (p43)

Another cornerstone of the standards agenda, evidence-based practice would also seem to be problematic. In noting the minimal impact of evidence-based practice in the context of the US, Scull & Winkler (2011), speculate that approaches such as Response to Intervention (RTI) may be partly responsible for a drop in numbers identified with specific learning disabilities but they cannot call on research comparing different parts of the country or which can demonstrate the wider impact of RTI. Similarly, where some researchers feel there has been clear research evidence the impact has been shown to be negligible. For example, McLesky and Waldron (2011) examined a range of different study types in segregated settings to identify components of High-Quality, Intensive Instruction for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities and then considered the extent to which these could be delivered in mainstream settings. They identified a range of very practical and manageable practices, but somewhat ironically, even though all these findings come from research conducted within segregated provision McLesky and Waldron had to recognise that these approaches were used rarely if at all in either separate provision or the mainstream.

The US experience suggests that the policies aiming to use the values of markets and standards do not create a new space, but perpetuate the old divides between schools and within schools. As the findings of McLesky and Waldron seem to demonstrate these seemingly dramatic shifts in policy do not bring into question the old ways of working. The unreconstructed aim to achieve education for all means that quite a few children are still being left behind. In this next section we will consider one country's experience to explore what some of the old ways of working may be.

### **A Norwegian Experience<sup>1</sup>**

A number of countries have taken what might be seen as a more dramatic step in their aims to deliver inclusive education. They have closed their special schools and by implication required the mainstream to adapt. Norwegian Special Schools closed in 1993 to become advisory centres alongside the Pedagogical Psychological Service (PPS) which

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<sup>1</sup> This section is based upon research conducted in 2011 by in 50 countries by the first author with colleagues from the Open University. As part of this research they conducted interviews, visited settings and explored the policy processes in Norway, Italy, Ireland and Japan (Rix et al 2013). The underlying challenges to inclusion raised here in relation to Norway could equally be applied to these other countries.



oversaw the assessment and funding of school provision for children with special educational needs. However, the closure of special schools has by no means meant the end of segregation and separate provision. The national data for 2010 recorded the ongoing presence of official “strengthened schools” providing segregated provision for about 0.3% of pupils, and full-time special education in the mainstream for 0.8% and part-time for 7.6 per cent were in part time. However there is also an unknown amount of provision which falls outside of the official statistics and considerable separation within everyday classrooms.

The Norwegian Education Act 1998 gave all pupils the right to adapted education<sup>2</sup> whilst maintaining that pupils had the right to special education if they did not, or were unable, to benefit satisfactorily from ordinary tuition. Despite many people seeing these two clauses as being in conflict subsequent policies embedded the dichotomy. For example, Equity in Education for All (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2008) required positive discrimination, at a national systemic level and at an individual level, with Inclusive education, Adapted education and Special education all having a key role

Interviewees suggested that the concepts and tensions between ‘adaptive’ and ‘special’ were formed from the ‘legacy’ of the previous policy context. This resulted in the belief that a young person with learning difficulties needed to be with his/her peers but, nevertheless, needed to learn something different from the rest of the class group. The consequence was not only withdrawal from the classroom but also internal exclusion within the classroom. For example pupils were taught at the back of classrooms by a special teacher while their peers worked on something completely different. There was a belief that different practices could be inserted into various spaces, which meant the spaces themselves were not being modified.

The lack of a nationally organised system of training and provision was seen as leading to practices varying from school to school. Locally, all kinds of provision could emerge. For example a parent talked effusively of a school she had worked at where they had a shed to accommodate a child with Down syndrome; this meant the child could work on her own but at the same time still see the other children. It was noted by all interviewees that children experienced segregation in both mainstream and strengthened schools, often spending most of their day in separate rooms. For example, at a strengthened school pupils had separate rooms to work uninterrupted with a special teacher, despite attempts by management to move to small group work. Staff described this as an old habit, arising from a wish not to be interrupted or distracted, as something “into our veins” and hard to eradicate, even after the PPS criticised the practice.

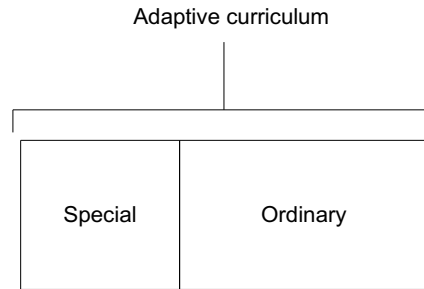
The type and amount of support pupils received depended upon what was considered to be ‘benefiting from ‘normal’ (adaptive) education. This ‘normal’ education seemed to emerge from a long tradition with a focus upon literacy and numeracy and “some basic things from daily life”. Teachers questioned why pupils could not do what their peers were doing rather than whether they needed to be doing an activity at all. This deviation

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<sup>2</sup> Education that was “adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of individual pupils”.

from the normal curriculum was regarded as ‘special education’. Special education’ became norm-referenced in relation to the pupil, focused upon them rather than the learning environment and determined by individual practitioners in PPS.

Interviewees found it hard to delineate the practical difference between ordinary adaptive and special adaptive education but they believed that there was a difference and that some pupils needed the latter. The following diagram was drawn for us:



The research team were not able to form a clear picture of the difference. It appeared that all these concepts defined each other. However, it was equally evident that practitioners were well aware of their professional responsibilities and of the moral force of national legislation. Interviewees explained that no teachers would question the policy or the theoretical concept of inclusion; but they seemed willing to live with the contradictions. For example, the official goal of policy was to identify children with special needs as early as possible, but the steady increase of special teaching from grade 1-10 resulted in a Norwegian saying that “we practise late intervention rather than early intervention” (see Figure 4)

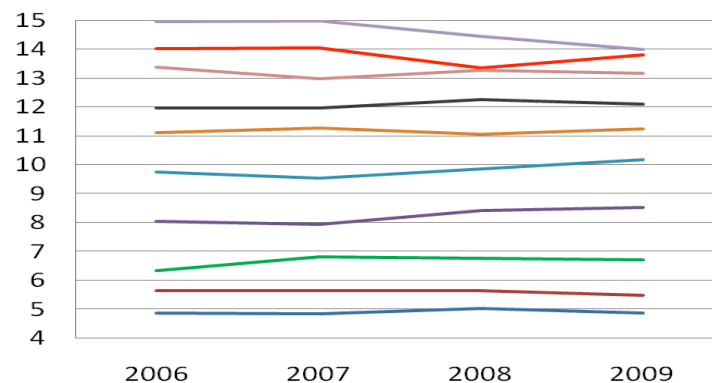


Figure 4 - Graph representing incremental support needs across years in Norway. Each coloured line represents the percentage in special education from year 2 at the bottom to year 10 at the top. (Source: Haustatter, 2011 in Rix et al, 2013)

This pattern of changing support reflected the attitudes of managers and staff. They described how inclusion was “very easy” when the children were young, but problems emerged as schools got closer to and entered the secondary phase. This was described partly as a consequence of an increasing academic focus and partly because of a developmental view of childrens’ relationships:

..... because the older they got, the tougher the curriculum got, the more theoretical, the less they were part of their group of peers in the school. So the

difference between them and their peers grew as they grew older, so they had little to do, or less and less to do in the mainstream school.'

The managers and staff did not raise the issue of 'pupil voice' nor the capacity of young people to have diverse relationships outside schools. By implication, their view of an inherent teenage disinterest in those on the social margins was counterbalanced by policy clearly related to social awareness and acceptance of 'difference'; however these policies were in turn set against the top-down pressure for schools to demonstrate higher grades in academic outcomes, as well as the previous policy contexts. Inclusion, it was suggested, had been initiated within a 'conservative' education system. Practice within this system had not changed or had only appeared to change before it reverted to previous practice. As a support teacher who had been working for two decades asked:

Why haven't we come further than this? [...]What is going on in the ordinary education is still the same.

Many interviewees suggested that teaching in Norway 'used to be more or less a private thing for the teacher' that is, the teacher operated in isolation and without interference. There was a strong sense of teachers focussed on good exam results rather than integrating children into their class. The longstanding response of teachers was that

In general, teachers, when they face students with special needs or problems .... don't really know how to look at the problem.

Teachers wanted further resources to address problems. Teachers and schools became 'clever' at producing an administrative decision which resulted in special education provision and parents become very protective of their children's allocated hours of support. There seemed to be some awareness of the risks of focussing upon diagnoses and functional assessment but interviewees noted a deep respect for, and desire to listen to, 'expertise'. Despite a lack of definition of the nature of this expertise there was considerable respect for colleagues further up the hierarchy or within certain elevated professions, and there was little evidence of distributed leadership. Similarly, attitudes to children, colleagues and matters of education were directly linked by interviewees to issues of training and the implied expertise which it provided. However, the focus of this training (for example emerging from different subject-base or the different theoretical allegiances of different universities or a different field of education, health and care) varied enormously, and as a result there were many examples of different "cultures meeting", not only between professional groupings but within them too. For instance, teachers were aware of, and extremely loyal to, their initial training institution and could identify where their training differed from their colleagues. Several interviewees, from a range of backgrounds, described the importance of 'speaking the language' of other groups. Despite the reliance upon expertise therefore the range of professionals involved undermined the roles the expertise could play, since the communication served as a barrier to professionals working together, compounding the traditional differences generated by training.

This reliance upon expertise also meant that it was seen in place where it might not be expected to exist. Ordinary teachers therefore were dependent on special teachers and

assessors to determine programmes for pupils in their class; they frequently had an unease about who had responsibility for the pupil. However, support assistants working with children with special educational needs did not require any formal training and qualified teachers did not require additional training. They had the expertise of experience.

## **Conclusion**

The issues identified above are representative of many countries (if not all) which have an established education system. The challenge of delivering inclusion in a system aiming at education for all is about “a web of ideological positions, entrenched interests, and education and social policies” (p280 Richardson & Powell, 2011), but also about the organisational location of its services and the everyday reality of mainstreams provision:

The main source of special education clients remains the “regular” classroom and “regular” educators, especially those who even if well meaning suffer from a lack of resources and training and thus neglect to serve all students regardless of the students’ individual characteristics. Conversely, general education is dependent on special education when it supplies additional and specialized pedagogies and services, offers an alternative educational environment when general education is challenged, and accepts those students removed from general education. (p281)

It would seem that special needs education and universal education’s need for ‘special needs’ are both reinforced and broadened by the widening of participation within schools. An unreconstructed education system, attempting to deliver education for more young people, inevitably pushes greater numbers to the margins. The call for Education for All within an unreconstructed education system can only be answered by the expansion of special education. As a consequence any call for Inclusive Education For All, as at Salamanca, has to be a call for the reevaluation of our ideas about education and the systematic ways in which we deliver on those ideas. If it is not then Inclusion becomes inherently associated with Special Educational Needs. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle. As Slee (2008) recognises the association with SEN undermines the chance of inclusive education achieving its educational and social reform agenda. It accepts the prevailing medical and psychological understandings of disability, targetting the ‘defects’ within an individual and ignoring the contribution of wider political, economic and social factors in the construction of disablement. It also limits our thinking, reinforcing “an unwillingness to engage with the cultural and institutional grammar of schooling to identify the social nature of disablement” (p108).

The wealth of literature which has emerged in recent years demonstrates that change needs to be system wide, at all levels of education. It provides plentiful scope for reflection too. For example, schools could engage in a fluid process of ‘continuous struggle’ (Allan, 2008, p101), involving a change in the ‘behaviour’ of adults (Ainscow and Sandhill, 2010), adopting a pedagogy which is underpinned by a principle of transformability (Hart, 2010), drawing flexibly upon a class-community and cooperative learning structures (Naraaian, 2011), and using a curriculum based upon values and rights (Booth, 2011). They can do so too with increasing numbers of specific pedagogic

approaches which have been shown to be effective and which are accessible for all practitioners, building on skills they already have available to them. (Rix & Sheehy, 2013). Despite these opportunities, however, as we have attempted to show within this chapter, separate and segregatory provision continues.

There has been minimal impact from a range of different policy processes, be that a call for inclusion, special school closure, a choice agenda or a drive for higher standards for all. The wider legacy of education seems to be the barrier. It is our reliance upon traditional ways of teaching using traditional subjects and assessment, focussing upon numeracy and literacy, within primary and secondary structures which underline an academic-vocational divide. It is about the bureaucratic need for funding streams, professional's processes of training, their established ways of working and their models of thinking. ...and of course anybody who has an interest in the subject knows that this is why inclusion is so hard to realise. As one Norwegian practitioner so succinctly explained:

I guess it is a little of many things. It's got to do with workload. It's got to do with money. It has got to do with curriculum. And it also has got to do with attitudes, because people's attitudes are different.[....] We are locked in and we don't have time to do this [share our competence] so, I have chosen to say it is a system problem.

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